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Sunday reading on carrying religion

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SUNDAY READING.

ON CARRYING RELIGION INTO THE Common Buſineſs of Life.

A DIALOGUE between JAMES STOCK and WILL SIMPSON, the Shoemakers, as they ſat at Work.

Sold by J. MARSHALL, (Printer to the CHEAP REPOSITORY for Religious and Moral Tracts) No. 17, Queen-Street, Cheapſide, and No. 4, Aldermary Church-Yard, and R. WHITE, Piccadilly, LONDON.

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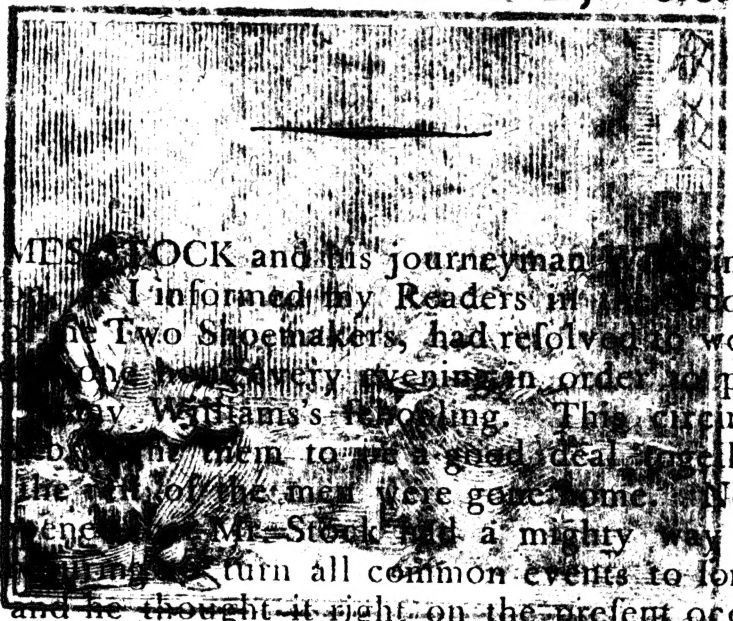
ON CARRYING RELIGION

A DIALOGUE, &c.



JAMES STOCK and his journeyman [illegible] I informed my Readers in the Second Part of the Two Shoemakers, had resolved to work together every evening in order to pay for the [illegible] Williams's schooling. This circumstance brought them to talk a good deal together when the rest of the men were gone home. Now it happened that Mr. Stock had a mighty way of endeavouring to turn all common events to some use; and he thought it right on the present occasion to make the only return in his power to Will Simpson for his great kindness. "For," said he, "if Will gives up so much of his time to help me to provide for this poor boy, it is the least I can do to try to turn part of that time to the purpose of promoting Will's spiritual good." Now as the bent of Stock's own mind was religious, it was easy to him to lead their talk to something profitable. He always took especial care however, that the subject should be introduced properly, cheerfully, and without constraint. As he

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well knew that great good may be sometimes done by a prudent attention in seizing proper opportunities, so he knew that the cause of piety had been sometimes hurt by forcing serious subjects where there was clearly no disposition to receive them. I say he had found out that two things were necessary to the promoting of Religion among his friends; a warm zeal to be always on the watch for occasions, and a cool judgment to distinguish which was the right time and place to make use of them. To know *how* to do good is a great matter, but to know *when* to do it is no small one.

Simpson was an honest good-natured fellow; he was now become sober, and rather religiously disposed. But he was ignorant, he did not know much of the grounds of Religion, or of the corruptions of his own nature; he was regular at Church, but was left drawn thither rather by his skill in psalm-singing than by any great devotion. He had left off going to the Greyhound, and often read the Bible or some other good book on the Sunday evening. This he thought was quite enough; he thought the Bible was the prettiest history book in the world, and that Religion was a very good thing for Sundays. But he did not much understand what business people had with it on working days. He had left off drinking because it had brought Williams to the grave, and his wife to dirt and rags; but not because he himself had seen the evil of sin. He now considered swearing and Sabbath breaking as scandalous and indecent; but he had not found out that both were to be left off because they are highly offensive to God, and grieve his Holy Spirit. As Simpson was less self-conceited

than moſt ignorant people are. Stock had always a good hope that, when he ſhould come to be better acquainted with the word of God, and with the evil of his own heart, he would become one day a good Chriſtian. The great hindrance was that he fancied himſelf ſo already.

One evening Simpſon had been calling to Stock's mind how diſorderly the houſe and ſhop, where they were now ſitting quietly to work, had formerly been, and he went on thus:

Will. How comfortably we live now maſter to what we uſed to do in Williams's time! I uſed then never to be happy but when we were keeping it up all night, but now I am as merry as the day is long. I find I am twice as happy ſince I am grown good and ſober.

Stock. I am glad you are happy, Will; and I rejoice that you are ſober, but I would not have you take too much pride in your own goodneſs for fear it ſhould become a ſin, almoſt as great as ſome of thoſe you have left off. Beſides, I would not have you make quite ſo ſure that you are good.

Will. Not good maſter! why don't you find me regular and orderly at work?

Stock. Very much ſo, and accordingly I have a great reſpect for you.

Will. I pay every one his own, ſeldom miſs Church, have not been drunk ſince Williams died, have handſome cloaths for Sundays, and ſave a trifle every week.

Stock. Very true. And to all this you may add that you very generouſly work an hour for poor Tommy's education, every evening without fee or reward.

Will. Well maſter, what can a man do more?

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If all this is not being good, I don't know what is.

Stock. All these things are very right as far as they go, and you could not well be a Christian without doing them. But I shall make you stare perhaps when I tell you, you may do all these things and many more, and yet be no Christian.

Will. No Christian! surely master I do hope that after all I have done, you will not be so unkind as to say I am no Christian?

Stock. God forbid that I should say so Will. I hope better things of you. But come now, what do you think it is to be a Christian.

Will. What! why to be christened when one is a child, to learn the Catechism when one can read, to be confirmed when one is a youth, and to go to Church when one is a man.

Stock. These are all very proper things, and quite necessary. They make a part of a Christian's life. But for all that, a man may be exact in them all, and yet not be a Christian.

Will. Not be a Christian! ha! ha! ha! you are very comical master.

Stock. No indeed, I am very serious, Will. At this rate it would be a very easy thing to be a Christian, and every man who went through certain forms would be a good man, and one man who observed these forms would be as good as another. Whereas, if we come to examine ourselves by the word of God, I am afraid there are but few comparatively whom our Saviour would allow to be real Christians. What is your notion of a Christian's practice?

Will. Why, he must not rob nor murder, nor

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get drunk. He muſt avoid ſcandalous things, and do as other decent orderly people do.

Stock. It is eaſy enough to be what the world calls a Chriſtian, but not to be what the Bible calls ſo.

Will. Why, maſter, we working men are not expected to be ſaints, and martyrs, and apoſtles, and miniſters.

Stock. We are not. And yet Will, there are not two ſorts of Chriſtianity; we are called to practiſe the ſame Religion which they practiſed, and ſomething of the ſame ſpirit is expected in us which we reverence in them. It was not ſaints and martyrs only to whom our Saviour ſaid, that they muſt "crucify the world with it's affections and luſts." We are called to "be holy" in our meaſure and degree, "as he who hath called us is holy." It was not only ſaints and martyrs who were told that they muſt be "like-minded with Chriſt"—That "they muſt do all to the glory of God"—That they muſt renounce the ſpirit of the world, and deny themſelves." It was not to apoſtles only that Chriſt ſaid "they muſt have their converſation in Heaven." It was not to a few holy men ſet apart for the altar that he ſaid "they muſt ſet their affections on things above"—That they "muſt not be conformed to the world."—"No, it was to Fiſhermen, to Publicans, to Farmers, to Day-labourers, to poor Tradeſmen that he ſpoke when he told them they muſt love not the world nor the things of the world"—"That they muſt renounce the hidden things of diſhoneſty, grow in grace, lay up for themſelves treaſures in Heaven."

Will. All this might be very proper for them to be taught, becauſe they had not been bred up

Christians, but Heathens; Jews and Christ wanted to make them his followers, that is, Christians. But thank God we do not want to be taught all this, for we are Christians born in a Christian country, of Christian parents.

Stock. I suppose then you fancy that Christianity comes to people in a Christian country by nature?

Will. I think it comes by a good education or a good example. When a fellow who has got any sense sees a man cut off in his prime by drinking, I think he will begin to leave it off. When he sees another man respected, like you master, for honesty and sobriety, and going to Church, why he will grow honest and sober and go to Church; that is, he will see it is his advantage to be a Christian.

Stock. Will, What you say is the truth, but is not the whole truth. You are right so far as you go, but you do not go far enough. The worldly advantages of piety are as you suppose, general gross Credit, prosperity and health almost naturally attend on a religious life, both because a religious life supposes an sober and industrious life, and because a man who lives in the course of duty puts himself in the way of God's blessing. But a true Christian has a still higher motive in view, and will follow Religion even under circumstances when it may hurt his credit and ruin his prosperity, if it should ever happen so to be the will of God that he should be brought into such a trying state.

Will. Well master, so I think then I will go to Church on Sundays, and follow my work in the week. I suppose this is the good

Stock. I agree with you that

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gives the beſt outward ſigns that he is good. But our going to Church, and even reading the Bible, are no proofs that we are as good as we need be, but rather that we do both theſe in order to make us better than we are. We do both on Sundays, as means by God's bleſſing to make us better all the week. We are to bring the fruits of that Chapter or of that Sermon into our daily life, and try to get our inmoſt heart and ſecret thoughts, as well as our daily conduct, amended by them.

Will. Why, ſure maſter, you won't be ſo unreaſonable as to want a body to be religious always? I can't do that neither. I'm not ſuch a hypocrite as to pretend to it.

Stock. Yes, you can in every action of your life!

Will. What maſter, always to be thinking about Religion?

Stock. No, far from it Will; much leſs to be always talking about it. But you muſt be always acting under it's power and ſpirit.

Will. But ſurely 'tis pretty well if I do this when I go to Church, or while I am ſaying my prayers. Even you maſter, as ſtrict as you are, would not have me always on my knees, nor always at Church I ſuppoſe; for then how would your work be carried on, and how would our town be ſupplied with ſhoes?

Stock. Very true, Will. 'Twould be no proof of our Religion to let our cuſtomers go barefoot; but 'twould be a proof of our baſeneſs, and we ſhould ſtarve as we ought to do. The buſineſs of the world muſt not only be carried on, but carried on with ſpirit and alacrity. We have the ſame authority for not being lukewarm in buſineſs as we have for being fervent in ſpirit." Religion has

but Godliness and laziness as wide asunder as any two things in the world; and what God has separated, let no man pretend to join. Indeed, the spirit of religion can have no fellowship with sloth, indolence, and self-indulgence. But still, a Christian does not carry on his common trade quite like another man neither. For something of the spirit which he labours to attain at Church, he carries with him into his worldly concerns. While there are some who set up for Sunday Christians, who have no notion that they are bound to be Week-day Christians too.

Will. Why, master, I do think, if God Almighty is contented with one day in seven, he won't thank you for throwing him the other six into the bargain. I thought he gave us them for our own use; and I am sure nobody works harder all the week than you do.

Stock. God, it is true, sets apart one day in seven for actual rest from labour, and for more immediate devotion to his service. But shew me that text, wherein he says, thou shalt love the Lord thy God on *Sundays*—Thou shalt keep my commandments on the *Sabbath Day*—To be carnally minded on *Sundays, is death*—Cease to do evil, and learn to do well *one day in seven*—Grow in grace on the *Lord's Day*—Is there any such text?

Will. No, to be sure there is not; for that would be encouraging sin in all the other days.

Stock. Yes, just as you do when you make Religion a thing for the Church and not for the world. There is no one lawful calling in pursuing which we may not serve God acceptably. You and I may serve him while we are fitching this pair of Boots. Farmer Furrow, while he is plowing yonder field.

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Betſy Weſt, over the way, whilſt ſhe is nurſing her ſick mother. Neighbour Ingle, in meaſuring out his tapes and ribbons. I ſay, all theſe may ſerve God juſt as acceptably in thoſe employments as at Church, I had almoſt ſaid more ſo.

Will. Aye, indeed—how can that be? Now you're too much on t'other ſide.

Stock. Becauſe a man's trials in trade being often greater, they give him freſh means of glorifying God, and proving the ſincerity of his religion. A man, who mixes in buſineſs, is naturally brought into continual temptations and difficulties. Theſe will lead him, if he be a good man, to look more to God, than he perhaps would otherwiſe do. He ſees temptations on the right hand and on the left; he knows that there are ſnares all around him, this makes him watchful; he feels that the enemy within is too ready to betray him, this makes him humble himſelf; while a ſenſe of his own difficulties makes him tender to the failings of others.

Will. Then you would make one believe, after all, that trade and buſineſs muſt be uſeful in itſelf, ſince it brings a man into all theſe ſnares and ſcrapes.

Stock. No, no, Will; trade and buſineſs don't create evil paſſions—they were in the heart before—Only now and then they ſeem to lie ſnug a little—our concerns with the world bring them out into action a little more, and thus ſhew both others and ourſelves what we really are. But then, as the world offers more trials on the one hand, ſo on the other it holds out more duties. The more we are called to battle oftener, we have more opportunities of victory. Every temptation reſiſted, is an enemy ſubdued; and he that ruleth his own ſpirit, is better than he that taketh a city.

Will. I don't quite understand you, master.

Stock. I will try to explain myself. There is no passion more called out by the transactions of trade than covetousness. Now, 'tis impossible to withstand such a matter in as that, without carrying a good deal of the spirit of religion into one's trade.

Will. Well, I own I don't yet see how I am to be religious when I'm hard at work, or busy settling an account. I can't do two things at once; 'tis as if I were to pretend to make a shoe and cut out a boot at the same moment.

Stock. Then you both must go together. Nay, the one must be the motive to the other. God commands us to be industrious, and he gives us the motive of pleasing him as the main spring of our industry.

Will. I don't see how I am always to be thinking about pleasing God.

Stock. Suppose, now, a man had a wife and children whom he loved, and wished to serve, would not he be often thinking about them while he was at work? and though he would not be always thinking about them, yet would not the very love he bore them be a constant spur to his industry? He would always be pursuing the same course from the same motive, though his words and even his thoughts must often be taken up in the common transactions of life.

Will. Well, I'll try first one, then the other, now for trade, now for religion!

Stock. I will shew that both must go together. I will suppose you were going to buy so many skins of the currier—that is going a worldly transaction—you can't see what a spice of religion has to do with buying a few calves' skins. Now, I tell you

it has a great deal to do with sin. Covetousness, a desire to make a good bargain, may rise up in your heart. Selfishness, a spirit of monopoly, a wish to get all in order to distress others, these are evil desires, and must be subdued. Some opportunity of unfair gain offers, in which there may be much sin, and yet little scandal. Here a Christian will stop short, he will recollect that "he who maketh haste to be rich, shall hardly be innocent." Perhaps the sin may be on the side of your dealer—he may want to overreach *you*—this is provoking—you are tempted to violent anger, perhaps to swear—Here is a fresh demand on you for a spirit of patience and moderation, that there was before for a spirit of justice and self-denial. If, by God's grace, you get the victory over these temptations, you are the better man for having been called out to them. Always provided, that the temptation be not of your own seeking. If you give way, and sin under these temptations, don't go and say that trade and business have made you covetous, passionate, and profane. No, no, depend upon it, you were so before; you would have had all these evil seeds lurking in your heart, if you had been loitering about at home, and doing nothing, with the additional sin of idleness into the bargain. When you are busy, the devil often tempts you, when you are idle, you tempt the devil. If business and the world call these evil tempers into action, business and the world call that Religion into action too which teaches us to resist them. Thus in this you see the Week-day duty of the Sunday Spirit. It is trade and business in the Week which call us to put our Sunday readings, prayers, and Church-going into practice.

Will. Well, Maſter, you have a comical way, ſome how, of paſſing over gnat. I never ſhould have thought there would have been any religion wanted in buying and ſelling a few calves' ſkins. But, I begin to ſee there is ſomething in what you ſay.—And, whenever I undertake a common action, I will try to remember that it muſt be done "after a Godly ſort."

Stock. I hear the clock ſtrike nine—let us leave off our work. I will only obſerve further, that one good end of our bringing Religion into our buſineſs is, to put us in mind not to undertake more buſineſs than we can carry on conſiſtently with our Religion. I ſhall never commend that man's diligence, though it is often commended by the world, who is not diligent about the ſalvation of his ſoul. We are as much forbidden to be overcharged with the *cares* of life as with its *pleaſures*. I only wiſh to prove to you, that a diſcreet Chriſtian may be wiſe for both worlds; that he may employ his hands without entangling his ſoul, and labour for the meat that periſheth without neglecting that which endureth unto eternal life; that he may be prudent for time, while he is wiſe for eternity.

Z.

O That my God would guide my ways,
To keep his statutes still!
O that my God would grant me grace
To know and do his will!

Lord, lead me by thy perfect word,
Thy Spirit write it on my heart,
Nor let my tongue indulge deceit,
Nor act a double part.

From vanity, Lord, turn mine eyes,
Let no contempt defile,
No covetous desires arise
Within this soul of mine.

Order my footsteps by thy word,
And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.

My soul hath gone too far astray,
My feet too often slip;
I wou'd not, Lord, forget thy way,
Bring back thy wand'ring sheep.

VI.

Make me to walk in thy commands,
'Tis a delightful road;
Nor let my head, or heart, or hands,
Offend against my God.

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